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Public Fasting;

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The MANNER in which

CHRISTIANS

Should observe a

PUBLIC FAST.

By *SAMUEL PIKE.* K

The SECOND EDITION:

With such Alterations as adapt it to the approaching FAST.



L O N D O N :

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The Manner in which CHRISTIANS
should observe a PUBLIC FAST.



THE Seasonableness of this Question at this Time is apparent to every one. And I doubt not, but there are many at some Loss how to act on such a Solemnity, who would be glad to have some suitable and scriptural Advice upon the present Subject. Being willing therefore to give Assistance herein. I offer the following Thoughts; as containing some proper Directions in this serious Matter. In order to be able to exhibit proper Rules in the Case, I have seriously and attentively searched the sacred Scriptures; and have extracted the whole from thence.

Without any farther Introduction, let me proceed to an immediate Answer to the above Question, that every one to whom these Lines may come, may know what God requires of him, on the approaching public solemn Fast, which is appointed to be observed on *Friday, February* the 17th.

It is taken for granted that there will be public Worship solemnized all the Kingdom over, on that Day; both in the established Church and among the Dissenters; and that the Ministers of the Gospel will make it their Business to adapt their Prayers and Discourses to the Nature and Occasion of the Solemnity. Accordingly it must likewise be taken for granted, that all Christians ought, and that all serious Christians will attend public Worship on that

that Day, if able, I hope none will venture to give way to light and trifling Excuses; but will look upon it as a Matter of Conscience to attend the Sanctuary in the Time or Times of divine Service; and when there, to attend with Decency, Seriousness, and Diligence; avoiding every thing that has the Appearance of Irreverence and Levity; and this with a View to have their Hearts affected and their Souls suitably imprest. I shall therefore dwell no longer upon this Part of the Worship of the Day.

But let not any Christians imagine that the whole Observance of a Fast consists in an Attendance on the public Worship. There is much beside to be done on such a Day in the Closet or Family, in order to a due and proper Sanctification of a Fast Day.

Let me then set forth, in as plain and familiar a Manner as I can, the several Things that are to be avoided, and performed on that Day; deducing the whole from the Word of God. And so I would shew you,

I. *What you are to abstain from.*

II. *What you are to be employed in on that Day.*

I. *What you are to abstain from.* Which lies in these four Particulars.

I. Certainly you are to abstain from *Sin* and Iniquity. This indeed we ought to do at all Times; endeavouring to be holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from Sinners; after the Example of Christ our Lord. Sin on every Day is exceeding sinful; but its Sinfulness is peculiarly aggravated at such a Season; when the Nation joins together as one Man, to confess their Iniquities and to deprecate deserved Judgments. More particularly, if you have lived in the Love and Practice of any known Sins, now there is a special Call upon you to search

and try your Ways, and turn again to the Lord. See Isa. lviii. 6. *Is not this the Fast that I have chosen? To loose the Bands of Wickedness, to undo the heavy Burdens, &c.* Let the Drunkard, the Swearer, the Extortioner, the Unjust, the unclean Person, and every other that has lived in the Practice of any Abomination, know, that unless he ceases from these Evils, and resolves, in the Strength of the Lord, that wherein he has done Iniquity he will do so no more; his keeping the Fast in other Respects will be to no valuable Purpose, nor be accepted of the Lord; but if he persists in his Iniquities, he is continually treasuring up Wrath against the Day of Wrath, and making continual Additions to the National Guilt.

2. You should on this Day abstain from *Labour*, and from all secular Employments throughout the Day. As worldly Business profanes the Sabbath Day, so it pollutes a Fast Day. This is plain from the Direction given for the solemn Fast on the Day of Atonement, *Lev. xvi. 29. Ye shall afflict your Souls, and do no Work at all.* Let every one therefore be careful and conscientious in contriving his secular Concerns beforehand, that he may be under no Necessity to attend his worldly Affairs, but may devote the whole Time to the public or private Exercises of that Day.

3. You should likewise abstain from all carnal *Pleasures*, *Recreations* and *Indulgencies*. In *Joel ii. 15, 16.* we have this Direction concerning a public Fast, *Blow the Trumpet in Zion, sanctify a Fast, call a solemn Assembly, &c. let the Bridegroom go forth of his Chamber, and the Bride out of her Closet.* Intimating, that the very Bride and Bridegroom, though they have a personal Occasion for Joy, yet upon such a public solemn Call, they should

should lay aside their own Pleasure, to join in with the public Mourning.

The Saints of old, we find, laid aside their Ornaments and put on Sackcloth, and used other Signs and Tokens of deep Mourning and Sorrow, on Fast Days. All which evidently teach us, that we are to abridge ourselves of our usual Pleasures, should by no means spend any Part of the Time in Sports, or pleasurable Amusements and Gratifications; and should banish every Thing either in Dress or Behaviour that has the Appearance of Levity, Gaiety, Delight, Pleasure and Merriment; and should put on all the decent Appearances of Gravity, Solemnity, and Concern of Mind; suited to the Design of the Day.

4. You should on this Day abstain even from your *ordinary Food*. This may be accounted an hard Saying, by many, and an unnecessary Thing by others. But the Word of God (not our own Inclinations) is to be the Rule of our Conduct. The Word *Fast* is no ambiguous Term in sacred Writ; but has one uniform Signification; always implying an *Abstinence from Food*; and I know not one Instance wherein it has a different Meaning. And besides, there are many Places of Scripture may be produced, wherein the Word *Fast* is distinctly explained in this Sense. I will leave the Reader to turn to the following, 2 Sam. xii. 16, 17. Ezra x. 16. Esther iv. 16. Dan. x. 2, 3. Jonah iii. 7. Acts ix. 9. xxvii. 33.

Now though this Kind of Abstinence may be looked upon by many as a trivial Circumstance; yet it is so essential to the Nature of a Fast, that it cannot be a Fast without it. A Day set apart in an extraordinary Manner for divine Service may be called a Day of *Prayer*, or a Day of *Humiliation*;

but cannot be called a *Fast* with any Propriety, unless the Appointment of the Day includes in it this Abstinence from ordinary Food.

If any should ask, Of what Use is this Abstinence, or what Necessity is there for it? I would answer in three Particulars. (1) It is sometimes a necessary Consequence of deep Concern and Humiliation of Soul. If a Person has his Heart filled with Grief, he loses all Relish, not only for Pleasures and Diversions, but for his usual Sustenance too. Thus Persons that are under great Sorrow for the Decease of a very dear Friend or Relative, are often so impressed as to be incapable of eating their Bread; and Tears are their Meat continually Day and Night. And I am persuaded, that if we should have on that Day a suitable deep Concern and Grief produced upon our Spirits under an awakening View of our national Sins and the Judgments we deserve, we should have little or no Inclination to partake of the common Supports of Life.

(2) This Abstinence may therefore be looked upon as a becoming Token of our Humiliation before God; and an Acknowledgment of our Unworthiness of the least Mercy at his Hands. Hereby we profess that we are Sinners before the Lord exceedingly, and that we have forfeited the very Food we eat, and all the Necessaries and Comforts of Life. And,

(3) This Abstinence is a very proper Means to dispose us for the solemn Duties of the Day. The Exercises of such a Day being of a sorrowful, humbling Nature, it is fit that the animal Frame should be suited to and disposed for that Work. We are to glorify God with our *Bodies* as well as with our Spirits, which are his. The Frame of the Body, or of animal Nature, is evidently a very
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great Help or Hindrance to the Frame of the Soul. For the animal Spirits to be lively and chearful, tending to Gladness and Mirth, must be very unsuitable to a Fast Day, and much better corresponds to a Festival or Day of Rejoicing. Now this Abstinence from the usual Supports of Life, has an Aptness and Tendency to put the animal Frame into such a Situation as becomes the Work of the Day. As therefore this is one grand End of the Act of *Fasting*, to be subservient to the Frame of the Mind; it therefore evidently becomes us to use as much Abstinence as can be subordinate to such an End. And I believe, if we attended more to this Particular, rather than to an Indulgence of the Appetite, we should, by the divine Blessing, find our spiritual Frames more happily correspondent to such humbling Solemnities. This very End of the Act of Fasting likewise instructs us, that we are not to observe it with such Rigour and Exactness as actually to unfit us for the spiritual Work of the Day; which must be determined by every one's Constitution, upon that Rule in *Hosea* vi. 6. *I have desired Mercy and not Sacrifice.* Only let every one act conscientiously in the Fear of God, conforming to this Abstinence as much as may safely be done.

Thus I have shewn what you are to abstain from on a Fast Day, namely, from *Sin*, from *Labour*, from *Pleasure*, and from *Food*. I would now proceed,

II. To shew *what you are to be employed in* on such a Day. And I find that the Holy Scriptures direct us to attend to the following Services.

1. To *Reading* some suitable Portions of sacred Writ, as was done in the public Fast in the Time of *Nehemiah*, ix. 3. And the Nature of the Thing tells us, that we should make Choice of those Parts of Scripture, as tend to shew us the Sinfulness of
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our Sins, the Awefulness of divine deserved Judgments, &c. and so to humble our Souls before God. The Holy Bible abounds with such Chapters, as represent the Case of God's professing People of old, similar to our Case, our Sins, and our Danger, as a Nation. I would not attempt to confine you to any ; but it may possibly be a Help to some Persons if I just mention a few.

I would therefore take the Freedom to nominate the following affectionate, instructive, and humbling Chapters, as fit to be read in the Family or Closet, as well as in public on such an Occasion, *Deut.* chap. xxviii. and xxxii. the 9th Chapter of *Ezra*, the 9th of *Nehemiah*, and the 9th of *Daniel*, together with *Psalms* lxxviii. lxxix. xciv. and cvi.

2. You should attend to solemn *Meditation* and serious *Consideration*: according to the Direction in *Haggai* i. 5. *Thus saith the LORD of Hosts, consider your Ways.* We should set ourselves to think over and revolve in our Minds those Things concerning ourselves and others as will tend to excite and promote a Spirit of Humiliation and true Repentance. Particularly I would advise, that we should look attentively in the first Place into our own Sins and Corruptions ; the Unworthiness of our Persons and the Imperfections of our Duties. Then in the next Place to look around us, and observe how Iniquity and Infidelity abound, and the Love of many waxes cold ; what a sad Departure there is from the Doctrines, Spirit, and Practice of the Gospel ; considering ourselves at the same Time as a Part of that Nation that is thus sunk by Iniquity. It may be proper likewise to observe what Tokens, what awful Tokens there are of the Divine Displeasure against us, in the Disappointments we have met with. We should likewise

wise meditate with Compassion on the inexpressible Miseries of our Fellow Christians and Fellow Protestants in *Germany*, which is now the Seat of a most bloody and destructive War; remembering that *we* deserve to feel the same or like Distresses, and have just Reason to fear them, if we continue our Provocations. Such Contemplations as these, though they are far from being delightful, yet they are very proper and necessary; and may become very useful to us. *

3. You should address yourselves to humble *Confession* and *Supplication*. According to the Example of the holy Prophet *Daniel*, who in his solemn Fast *prayed unto the Lord and made his Confession*, Dan. ix. 3, 4.

Every Person apart, and every Family apart, ought to present themselves before the Throne of Grace, confessing their Sins, deprecating divine Judgments, and supplicating divine Favours. This is certainly one great Part of the Work of the Day, which Christians ought to attend to, not only in the public Assembly, but likewise in their Closets and Families. We should endeavour to be more peculiarly solemn, affectionate and earnest in our Addresses to God upon such an Occasion, pouring forth our Souls before the Lord in humble Confession, ardent Petition, and importunate Pleading: Confessing our own Sins, the Sins of our Families, the Sins of our Churches, and of our Nation: Begging pardoning Grace, renewing Grace, and quickening Grace for ourselves and others: not forgetting to intercede with God for our rightful Sovereign King *GEORGE*, for the Prince of *Wales*, and all the Royal Family; and for all in Authority; that they may be divinely directed to act with all Faithfulness for the Welfare of the Nation, the Suppression

pression of Vice, and the Promotion of true Religion and Virtue. We should likewise earnestly pray for our Protestant Colonies in *America*, that they may not be given into the cruel Hands of savage and popish Enemies: and for the Preservation of the Protestant Interest in *Germany*; that the illustrious KING of PRUSSIA may continue to be strengthened and succeeded against his unjust, numerous, and barbarous Foes. In all, pleading the Necessity of our Case, the Merits of Christ, and the important Interests of his Kingdom.

4. I must likewise advise that the Work of the Day be continued by *Conversation* with each other upon suitable Subjects. What Time is not taken up in public or secret Devotions may be well employed by talking *seriously* with our Children, or with our Servants, or with one another, about the declining State of Religion, the Sins of the Nation, the Judgments deserved and feared, the present Wonders of Providence, and the Necessity that God should revive and maintain his Work in the midst of the Years.

5. Neither should *Singing of Psalms* be omitted either in public or private, on such an Occasion. For tho' this Duty at first View has the Idea of Joy and Pleasure in it; yet we find that *David* was led by the Spirit to pen the 51st Psalm, as an Expression of his true Humiliation and Repentance. And besides, we must not forget, that in the midst of Judgment God remembers Mercy; for we are now called to a most thankful Admiration of the unparallel'd Success Divine Providence has already granted to that noble *German* Prince, who is wonderfully raised up and qualified to fight the Battles of the LORD.

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6. In the last Place you are called upon on this Occasion to perform *Works of Mercy and Charity*, to the Distressed and Neceffitous. According to what the LORD says by the Prophet *Isaiah*, ch. lviii. 6, 7. *Is not this the Fast that I have chosen? To loose the Bands of Wickedness, to undo the heavy Burdens, and to let the Oppressed go free, and that ye break every Yoke? Is it not to deal thy Bread to the Hungry, and that thou bring the Poor that are cast out to thy House? When thou seest the Naked that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own Flesh?*

Nothing is more proper as an outward Acknowledgment of our Unworthiness before the Lord, of our Dependance upon him, and of our expecting Mercy from him, than thus to extend our Liberality to the Poor and Neceffitous. Hereby we shew that our Hearts are thankful for the comfortable Supplies we enjoy, and that we compassionate the Miseries of our Fellow-Creatures. I would therefore hope that the Hearts and Hands of all those who have any Property will be open on the Fast Day, liberally to contribute to relieve the Necessities of the Poor, who are pinched with Hunger and Cold, through the Dearness of Provisions, and the Severity of the Winter.

Thus you have a plain and summary View of what you are to abstain from, and what you are to be employed in on the Fast Day. How that, ceasing to do Evil, and abstaining from Labour, Pleasure, and your ordinary Food; you are not only to give a serious and conscientious Attendance on the Public Worship of the Day; but likewise in your Closets and Families to read over some suitable Portions of sacred Writ, to meditate upon soul-humbling Subjects, to address the Lord by secret
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and humble Confession and Supplication, to sing the Praises of the Lord ; and that none of the Day be lost or misapplied, to converse with each other in a serious Manner about the Things which occasioned the Appointment of the Fast: To all which you are to add a liberal Contribution of Part of your Substance to refresh the Bowels, and supply the Wants of the Poor and Needy.

I shall conclude with a few general Cautions and Directions in brief.

(1.) Beware of spiritual Pride, trusting in or boasting of your Performances or Devotions. If you value yourselves upon what you do, this will be very offensive to the holy and jealous God, and will be destructive of that true Humility, which is so necessary upon the Occasion.

(2.) Let your Hopes of Mercy be founded only upon the Merits and Intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ. While you are viewing the Sinfulness of Sin, and lamenting before God your own Case, and the State of the Nation, turn your Eyes to him, whose Blood alone is able to cleanse from all Sin.

(3.) Carry the Solemnities of the Day into your future Life. Do not forget what you have been confessing of, and praying for before God. Do not imagine that when the Day is over you have no more to do ; but keep up in a continual Remembrance the Occasion, and the Solemnities of it ; that the Fruits of it may appear in the Frame of your Hearts, and the Conduct of your Lives ever after.

Thus we may humbly hope that the Lord will hear our Supplications, and grant us, our Nation, our Colonies, and our Allies, those temporal and spiritual Blessings which may make us rejoice in his Favour and Salvation.

F I N I S.

